DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 179 903 CG 014 048

AUTHOR Rosenberg, Morris: McCullough, B. Claire
TITLE Mattering: Inferred Significance and Mental Health Among Adolescents.
INSTITUTION Maryland Univ., College Park.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Mental Health (DHEW), Rockville, Md.
PUB DATE 27 Aug 79
GRANT MH27747
NOTE 44p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association (Boston, Massachusetts, August 27, 1979): Best copy available

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents: *Beliefs: *Mental Health: Parent Attitudes: *Parent Child Relationship: Perception: *Relationship: *Self Esteem: Surveys

ABSTRACT

The beliefs of adolescents, specifically that they matter to their parents, was investigated using four large-scale samples of adolescents at different grade levels and located in different sections of the country, as well as a nationwide sample of tenth grade boys. Survey items captured diverse expressions of mattering, i.e., the feeling that one is an object of interest to parents, that one is important to parents, that one is an object of concern, that one's opinions count, and that one is wanted. Results indicated that: (1) parental mattering is related to global self-esteem and that this relationship is not attributable to the child's beliefs that the parents hold negative or positive attitudes about him/her: (2) feelings that one matters are associated with many dimensions of mental health: and (3) adolescents who were also juvenile delinquents tended to feel that they did not matter to their parents. (Author/HLM)

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MATTERING: INFERRED SIGNIFICANCE AND MENTAL HEALTH AMONG ADOLESCENTS*

Morris Rosenberg and B. Claire McCullough

University of Maryland

Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Boston, Massachusetts, August 27, 1979

CG 014048

*The research reported in this article was funded by a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health (MH27747). The data and tabulations were made available (in part) by the Institute for Social Research Social Science Archive (originally collected under the supervision of Jerold G. Bachman, Survey Research Center) and by Edward Z. Dager, who permitted us to examine his East Chicago High School Study data. Neither investigator bears responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here. The authors are also grateful to Mary Collins for her excellent computer assistance.

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MATTERING: INFERRED SIGNIFICANCE AND MENTAL HEALTH AMONG ADOLESCENTS

The familiar term "significant others," introduced by Harry Stack Sullivan (1947, 1953), succinctly reflects the idea that some people matter to us greatly whereas others do not, and that the views attributed to those significant others make more of a difference than the views of those who count little (Hughes, 1962; Denzin, 1966). Research has amply documented the wisdom of this observation (Rosenberg, 1973). What is generally overlooked, however, is the obverse -- the degree to which we feel we matter to others. Do we believe that we count in other's lives, loom large in their thoughts, make a difference to them? Are we an object of another's concern, interest, or attention?

So viewed, mattering is the direct reciprocal of significance. Like significance, mattering may rest on different foundations. The conviction that one matters to another person is linked to the feeling that

(a) one is an object of his attention, (b) that one is important to him, and (c) that he is dependent on us.

Attention - The most elementary form of mattering is the feeling that one commands the interest or notice of another. The only prospect more bleak than to die unmourned is to die unnoticed. The acts of many assassins or highjackers is frequently to be understood as the desperate actions of nonentities to impinge, even if briefly or negatively, on the minds of others. In the words of William James (293-4):

> We have an innate propensity to get ourselves noticed... by our kind. No more fiendish punishment could be devised, were such a thing physically possible, than that one should be turned loose in society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all the members thereof. If no one turned round when we entered, answered when we spoke, or minded what we did, but if every person we met 'cut us dead,' and acted as if we were non-existing things, a kind of rage and impotent despair would ere long well up in us, from which the cruellest bodily tortures would be a relief; for these would make us feel that, however bad might be our plight, we had not sunk to such a depth as to be unworthy of attention at all.

And Charles Horton Cooley expresses this idea in the story of Philoctetes, whose greatest woe is not the tribulations he has suffered but the fact that he is no longer of interest to others, that he is not an object of their concern (142).

> Philoctetes - And know'st thou not, O boy, whom thou dost see?
>
> Neoptolemus - How can I know a man I ne'er beheld?

Philoctetas - And didst thou never hear my name, nor fame
Of these my ills, in which I pined away?
Neoptolemus - Know that I nothing know of what thou ask'st
Philoctetes - O crushed with many woes, and of the Gods
Hated am I, of whom, is this my woe,
No rumor travelled homeward, nor went forth
Through any clime of Hellas.

Importance - Mattering is more strongly expressed in the feeling that we are important to the other person or are objects of his concern. To believe that the other person cares about what we want, think, and do, or is concerned with our fate, is to matter. Whether the adolescent goes on to college or becomes hooked on drugs may deeply concern his parents whereas they would have no corresponding feelings regarding the fate of the boy or girl down the street. One sure sign of importance is whether we are someone's ego-extension.-- that we reflect on or constitute a part of him. The adolescent who knows his parents will swell with pride at his achievements feels himself to be their ego-extension; his triumph is their success, his defeat their failure. Mattering, it should be stressed, is independent of approval. That the other person persists in criticizing us does not mean that we do not matter; on the contrary, it may be precisely because we matter so much that makes him so intent on overcoming our imperfections.

Dependence - That our behavior is influenced by our dependence on other people is easily understood since most of our needs are satisfied by other human beings. What is much more mysterious is why our actions are equally governed by their dependence on us. The mother who rushes to put dinner on the table is impelled by the pressure of the fact that others are dependent on her to appease their hunger. The husband who feels his family is dependent

on his earnings is under a tremendous burden of obligation. The executive who feels that his division will go to pot without him is tied to his company not only by his feelings toward it but equally by its (assumed) feelings toward him.

Mattering represents a compelling social obligation and a powerful source of social integration: we are bonded to society not only by virtue of our dependence on others but by their dependence on us. Part of Durkheim's (1897) explanation for the lower rate of suicide among married men and women, especially those with children, rested on this foundation. He pointed out that if suicide were due to stress and the burdens of living, then married people with children should commit suicide more than single people, since the latter were relatively free of obligations. The fact that married people with children had lower suicide rates suggested that it was not simply the individual's dependence on others but also their dependence on him that served as an insulator against suicide.

From the above observations, it is fair to conclude that mattering is a motive; the feeling that others depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experience us as an ego-extension exercises a powerful influence on our actions. But since mattering is anchored in specific others, different people matter to us for different reasons. The present study deals with adolescents' beliefs that they matter to their parents. These beliefs, incidentally, are not necessarily accurate; but true or false, they have consequences.[2]

RESEARCH STRATEGY

The research strategy employed in this paper is theoretical replication. Theoretical replication involves the use of diverse measures of the same concepts employed in diverse samples. We turn first to a description of these diverse samples and measures.

Four large-scale surveys constitute the data files for this report: (1) a sample of 1678 juniors and seniors in 10 high schools in New York State collected in 1960; (2) a sample of 679 adolescents in 13 junior and senior high schools in Baltimore in 1968;[3] (3) a sample of 1998 high school students in two schools in East Chicago in 1966; and (4) a nationwide sample of 2213 tenth grade boys in 87 high schools in 1966. (Details regarding these samples appear respectively in Rosenberg, 1965; Rosenberg and Simmons, 1972· Dager, 1968; Bachman, 1970; and Bachman, et al., 1972).

The four studies differ widely not only in time and space but also in terms of the richness of the parental mattering measures. The items captured diverse expressions of mattering: the feeling that one is an object of interest to parents, that one is important to parents, that one is an object of concern, that one's opinions count, and that one is wanted. Whether the parents were dependent on the child or whether the child was an ego-extension could not be ascertained directly.

The Baltimore parental mattering index was based on three items asking the respondent how often the mother was interested in him, how interested the parents were in what he had to say, and how important a ..t of the family he was. New York had only a single indicator: how interested parents were in what the child had to say at mealtime conversations. In East Chicago, four items were used: how interested the respondent's father was in him, how interested his mother was in him,

whether he had ever felt that he was not wanted by his father, and whether he had ever felt he was not wanted by his mother. Finally, in the Nationwide study, subjects were asked whether they felt they had influence in family decisions, how often their parents listened to their side of the argument, how often parents talked over important decisions with them, how often parents ignored them when they did something wrong, and how often their parents acted as if they didn't care. Ignoring the subject or not caring were interpreted as reflections of lack of interest. Wherever possible, items reflecting favorable or unfavorable parental attitudes were excluded, although such attitudes may be implied in some items.

Before presenting the data, a discussion of our research strategy is in order. The rationale for examining common propositions in differing samples using differing measures obviously resides in the principle of replication. La Sorte (1972) has distinguished four types of replication: retest replication, internal replication, independent replication, and theoretical replication. The purpose of retest replication is to repeat the original study with few or no changes in order to provide a reliability check on the original study. Such replication essentially involves duplication. Internal replication tests whether essentially the same results appear among sub-samples of a broader sample; it is reflected in the consistency of the conditional relations (Finifter's, 1975, pseudo-replication is of this type). An important early example of internal replication was Stouffer's (1949: 92-95) "method of matched comparisons." Independent replication is designed to establish empirical generalizations by examining the same proposition among different populations, varying in nature, time, and place. Finally, theoretical replication refers to the

question of how diverse data bear on a common theoretical proposition. According to La Sorte (1972: 223): "In order to move toward a theoretical generalization, where empirical variables which have concrete anchoring points are abstracted and conceptualized to a higher theoretical plane, it is necessary to sample a variety of groups using different indicators of the same concepts." The reason is that every concept may be reflected in an infinite universe of indicators, each of which bears on probability relation to the underlying concept. Each indicator — or index — thus reflects both the concept plus some idiosyncratic or other component, characteristically labelled error. This principle is at the root of our present strategy, namely, to examine the same propositions across diverse samples using diverse indicators of the same concepts.

An example may serve to clarify the distinction between a theoretical replication and other types. Assume we wished to examine the relationship between race and self-esteem and, using the Total Net Positive Score of the Fitts Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, found no racial differences. Since this finding might violate our theoretical expectations, we might wish to replicate it in one or more other studies to insure that the initial result was not the consequence of sampling accident or systematic error. The duplication of these results in other carefully designed studies would increase confidence in the finding. But assume that in various studies we also found no relationship between race and the Butler-Haigh Self-Ideal discrepancy score, Osgood's semantic differential, the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, the Bills' Index of Adjustment and Values, and the Gough and Heilbrun Adjective Check List. Since these measures differ in various ways, the consistency of the results is almost certainly due to what they have in common; the most plausible interpretation

is that this common element is self-esteem. Other things equal, then, the theoretical proposition would appear to rest on a sounder foundation if common results appear when diverse measures are used than if the same measures are repeated.

The use of such diverse indicators, it may be pointed out, represents a more severe empirical test of the theoretical proposition for the following reason: Whereas the identical measure in different studies reflects both the common underlying concept plus some common error, the diverse indicators reflect the common underlying concept plus diverse error. Assuming random error, the likelihood that consistent empirical results across studies will appear is reduced. The severity of this test is exacerbated by the use of samples of diverse populations. In retest replication, the new sample should match the original as closely as possible; if the original study involved a college student sample, the replication should also involve college students. Theoretical replications, on the other hand, may involve samples with diverse populations. Since these populations differ among themselves, even perfect measurement would produce diversity of results. Furthermore, since each sample represents its population imperfectly, measurement error is superimposed on sampling error.

Difficult as it would be to achieve consistent univariate results when using different measures among different samples, it should be all the more difficult to obtain consistent bivariate relationships because each of the concepts is itself reflected in diverse indicators, each of which reflects the underlying concept plus unknown error. Hence, the likelihood of discovering consistent bivariate, or even multivariate, relationships among such concepts is reduced appreciably. Theoretical

replication thus constitutes a particularly severe test of a proposition.[4] At the same time, if this test is passed, it deserves respect, for it has overcome powerful forces working toward randomization.

Results

Mattering and Mental Health

Does mattering matter? We suggested earlier that mattering may affect behavior in diverse ways. But if it is true that people have a need to matter -- that they want to feel that they make a difference in others' lives -- then mattering should be associated with diverse aspects of mental health. We shall first consider the dimension of global self-esteem and then turn to other indicators of mental health.

Self-esteem - Self-esteem is defined here as the individual's global positive or negative attitude toward himself as an object. The mental health relevance of this dimension has been amply documented in prior research (Wylie, 1961; Kaplan, 1975; Turner and Vanderlippe, 1958). All four studies contained global self-esteem measures; these measures overlapped but were not identical. The New York State study employed the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale based on a Guttman scoring procedure (Rosenberg, 1965; Wylie, 1974); the East Chicago study used the same items but scored them according to the Likert procedure; and the Nationwide study combined six of these items with four drawn from other sources, scoring them according to the Likert procedure. The Baltimore study used a separate 6-item measure of self-esteem (Rosenberg and Simmons, 1972).

Are these diverse measures of parental mattering related to these diverse measures of self-esteem in these four different studies? In turns

out that all four studies show clear positive relationships between the adolescent's feeling that his parents are interested in and care about him and his global feeling of self-worth (Table 1). In Baltimore, gamma = .2094; in New York, .2798; in East Chicago, .2754; and in Nationwide, .2960. All four relationships are significant at the .001 level.

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TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

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But is this relationship due to the fact that the adolescent's parents care about him or that they think well of him? The distinction is crucial. To feel that we matter to others is conceptually distinct from feeling that they think well of us. There is, of course, ample evidence to indicate that our views of how others evaluate us (described as the "perceived self" by Miyamoto and Dornbusch, 1956, and as "subjective public esteem" by Sherwood and others) is closely related to our self-esteem (Reeder, Donohue, and Biblarz, 1960; Sherwood, 1965, 1967; Rosenberg and Simmons, 1972). But if mattering per se makes a difference for the adolescent's self-esteem, then it should make a difference whether the youngster's parents think well of him or not. It should, in other words, be independent of the perceived self.

In general, the data on parental perceived selves -- whether the child believes his parents hold favorable or unfavorable attitudes toward him -- are skimpy in these studies so that a completely adequate test of the issue is not at hand. Nevertheless, the evidence appears highly suggestive.

The Baltimore perceived self items are the most satisfactory and direct. The subjects were asked: "Would you say that your mother thinks

you are a wonderful person, a pretty nice person, a little bit of a nice person, or not such a nice person?" The same question was asked for the father, and the two items were combined into a parental perceived self index.

It will be recalled that, in Baltimore, the zero-order gamma of mattering to global self-esteem is .2069. Table 1 shows that, when we control on parental perceived self, the first-order partial gamma is .2017 -- a trivial difference. To believe that others consider you important, are interested in you, and pay attention to you is related to global self-esteem virtually independently of whether their attitudes are positive or negative.

Both in New York and in East Chicago, the only perceived self items were whether the subject felt he was his mother's favorite child and whether he was his father's favorite child. This index has several limitations: First, most respondents said there was no favorite child; second, although being a favorite child suggests that your parents think well of you, not being a favorite child does not necessarily mean they do not. Despite these limitations, the results are suggestive. In East Chicago, the zero-order relationship of parental mattering and self-esteem is gamma = .2754; the partial gamma (controlling on favorite child) is .2990. In New York, the corresponding figures are .2798 and .3211 (Table 1). Plainly, the original relationship between parental mattering and self-esteem is not attributable to the child's feeling that he is the parental favorite.

In this discussion we have been relating weak measures of mattering to questionable measures of self-esteem controlling on dubious measures of the perceived self. Despite the variety of measures, however, the results across studies -- not only the zero-order relationships but the first-order partials -- are impressively consistent. They suggest that parental mattering is related to global self-esteem and that this relationship is not attributable to the child's belief that his parents hold positive or negative attitudes toward him.

Parental mattering and other mental health measures - The data thus suggest that mattering matters to youngsters, at least as far as self-esteem is concerned. But does it have further mental health implications as well? Again, the measures of mental health across the studies are diverse and vary considerably in quality, ranging from excellent in the Nationwide study, fair in the Baltimore study, and poor in the East Chicago and New York studies. Such diversity, of course, militates against cross-study consistency, thus representing a formidable test of the theoretical proposition at issue.

The Baltimore study included a 6-item Guttman scale of "depressive affect," asking respondents how happy they were, whether they got a lot of fun out of life, whether they were usually cheerful, etc.; a measure of somatic disturbance (how healthy the adolescent felt, how often he was tired, and how often he felt sick in the stomach); and a measure of "worries" (worrying about doing well in school, about being laughed at, about what others think of you, etc.).

In the Nationwide study, depression was measured by a 6-item score dealing with the respondent's feeling that the future was bright, that

things seemed hopeless, that he was bored, that he was often down in the dumps, etc. Anxiety-tension was measured by a 5-item index dealing with feeling jittery, tense, relaxed, worried, and nervous. The Nationwide study of somatic symptoms is an 18-item checklist of physical complaints which are frequently interpreted as psychophysiological indicators of anxiety (Stouffer et al, 1950; Srole, 1962; Gurin et al, 1960). This measure includes such symptoms as nervousness, headaches, loss of appetite, shortness of breath, dizziness, and trembling hands. Finally, "negative affective states" is a composite score of six closely related scales (irritability, general anxiety, anxiety and tension, depression, anomia, and resentment) based on a total of 40 items.

Unfortunately, neither the East Chicago nor New York State studies contained direct, adequate measures of mental health. Each, however, contained a small number of items which expressed certain feelings of depression. In New York, subjects were asked whether or not they were usually in good spirits and whether they had generally been happy or unhappy earlier in life. The East Chicago items had a stronger flavor of anomia (Srole, 1956) or fatalism combined with depression: one item dealt with the respondent's view that planning was futile since plans never worked out anyway, that these days one didn't know who one could count on, and that the subject was less happy than he used to be.

Table 2 shows that, with the exception of the worry measure in Baltimore, the feeling that one matters to parents is clearly related to various measures of emotional disturbance; the nine other relationships vary between gamma = .12 and .42, and all are significant at the .001 level.

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TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

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The adolescent who feels he matters little to his parents is thus strikingly more likely to be depressed, anxious, and otherwise disturbed, however measured. But is this because his self-esteem is inordinately low? The data in Table 2 suggest that this is the explanation in part, but only in part. Leaving aside the Baltimore worries measure (essentially a null relationship), the various other relationships decline somewhat when self-esteem is controlled, but still remain strong. The feeling that one matters to one's parents is thus associated with a number of fundamental dimensions of mental health <u>independent of the adolescent's global self-esteem</u>.

<u>Mattering and Social Adjustment</u>

<u>Delinquency</u> - There is thus a clear connection between the adolescent's feeling that he matters to his parents and diverse dimensions of mental health, variously measured. The question is: are these effects solely in the mind of the adolescent or do they connect with socially significant behavior? One type of behavior that is particularly relevant during adolescence is delinquency. When we speak of delinquency, we shall not be referring primarily to serious crime but chiefly to minor infractions, acts which are not uncommon among adolescents. Since delinquency is primarily a male phenomenon at this age, we shall confine our analysis in this section to the boys in the samples.

The Baltimore study contained a somewhat vague "trouble" index

asking youngsters how often they got into trouble at home, in school, with friends, and with the police. As Table 3 shows, youngsters who scored low on the mattering index were more likely to get into trouble with others, although the relationship was not strong or significant (gamma = .1097).

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TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

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Unlike the Baltimore measure, which spoke vaguely of "trouble," the Nationwide delinquency measures were very concrete. Five measures of delinquency are available. Delinquent behavior in school is a 7-item index based on such experiences as getting into school fights, being suspended or expelled from school, cutting classes, damaging school property, hitting a teacher, etc. Frequency of delinquent behavior is a 9-item measure assessing how often the youth has stolen from stores, run away from home, trespassed, injured someone in a fight, etc. The seriousness of delinquency index is a 10-item score (overlapping with frequency) measuring whether the infraction was minor -- stealing hubcaps, pilfering, etc. -- or major -- committing armed robbery, arson, etc. Theft and vandalism is a 9-item index referring to pilfering, damaging school property, car stealing, etc. Finally, total delinquency is a 26-item scale based on the other four measures. There is, then, overlap among the five delinquency measures.

The conceptualization of delinquency as a continuum avoids the labeling fallacy which views delinquency as an absolute property of the individual. Few youths have committed most of these infractions but few

have committed none at all. Table 3 shows that school delinquency, frequency of delinquency, seriousness of delinquency, theft and vandalism, and total delinquency are all related to parental mattering at the .001 level; the gammas range between .22-.38.

The East Chicago data were quite flimsy but there are two items which reflect rather minor deviance, nonconformity, or social difficulty: the first dealt with how often the boy smoked, the second with how often he skipped school. The two items were combined to form a "rule violation" score. The relationship of this score to parental mattering was gamma = .2662 ($p < .001$).

Why the adolescent who believes his parents have little interest in him or care little for him should turn to delinquency is a question that merits speculation. William James tells us that we have an "innate propensity" to get ourselves noticed and that the failure to command the attention of other people is more painful than the "cruellest bodily tortures." But if the need to feel that one makes a difference is so powerful, then may not the recourse to delinquency be a device designed to make an impression, attract attention, command notice, or have an impact, even if these are all negative? The delinquent may be deplored but he cannot be ignored. The despair of his teachers, the ravings and hysteria of his parents, the impotent fury of the police are all vivid testimony to the fact that he makes a difference, that he counts; and this sense of significance is intensified by the support of his delinquent peers who value his contribution to the group's collective purposes. Furthermore, what incentive does he have for remaining nondelinquent? Many a youth who does as he is told is rewarded by remaining unnoticed,

and is treated as a cipher and a nonentity. Thus, one reason for delinquency may be that it makes unimportant people feel important. This interpretation would be consistent with the observation that the pathological assassin or skyjacker is impelled to bizarre but notorious acts because it endows him with a feeling of significance, however fleeting, in the minds of others in place of the social indifference to which he is normally subjected.

Significance and Mattering

We suggested earlier that mattering may be viewed conceptually as the reciprocal or inverse counterpart of interpersonal significance. A significant other is one who matters to us; mattering refers to how much we matter to them. That the two concepts need not necessarily be empirically linked is recognized in the age-long theme of unrequited love: the beloved matters to us but we don't matter to him or her.

The question is, then, whether mattering and significance are empirically related. Like the other measures, the measures of parental significance vary across the studies. The Baltimore index of parental significance was straightforward: subjects were asked whether they cared very much, somewhat, a little, or not at all about what their mothers thought of them, and the same question was asked about fathers. Table 4 shows a strong empirical association between parental significance and parental mattering. Those whose parents are significant to them are considerably more likely to believe they are important to their parents (gamma = .3691, $p < .001$).

In the East Chicago study, the indicators of parental significance

were more abundant though less straightforward. Respondents were instructed as follows:

"Some of the people below are very CLOSE TO YOU -- you care about them very much. There are others that you may not care about at all -- you don't feel close to them at all. Would you say that the following people are very close to you, close, a little close, or not at all close to you?" A number of other people were mentioned including "my father" and "my mother."

"Now think for a second about how much each of the following people INFLUENCE YOU. Think about their influence in ALL AREAS of your life. Would you say that the following people influence you very much, some, a little, or not at all?" Again, mother and father were included on the list.

These four items were combined to form a parental "significant others" index. The gamma = .6564 ($p < .001$) shown in Table 4 indicates that parental significance is very closely tied to parental mattering in East Chicago.

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TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

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In the Nationwide study, respondents were asked whether they felt extremely, quite, fairly, or not close to their fathers, and the same question was asked about mothers. On the assumption that the youngster who feels close to his parents considers them more important to him that one who does not, these two items were combined to form a parental significance index. The association between this index and the measure of parental mattering in this study was gamma = .4337 ($p < .001$).

Since the New York State study lacked any indicators of parental significance, the hypothesis could not be tested in this sample. Nevertheless, the strong relationships in the other three samples, as well as the absence of evident confounding factors, offers persuasive evidence that there is a tendency toward reciprocity between mattering and significance: we tend to care about those who, we believe, care about us.

Social and Cultural Influences

That the adolescent wants to matter to his parents is evident. The question is: why do youngsters differ in this respect? To some extent, idiosyncratic factors in the family are decisive. Many years ago, Horney (1950) observed that, although the childhood circumstances that may be associated with neurotic personality development are almost infinitely varied, they have one element in common, namely, parental egocentricity. Speaking of such adverse circumstances, she held that "when summarized, they all boil down to the fact that the people in the environment are too wrapped up in their own neuroses to be able to love the child, or even to conceive of him as the particular individual he is; their attitudes toward him are determined by their own neurotic needs and responses" (Horney, 1950: 19). We interpret this to suggest that the neurotic parent is not genuinely interested in the child for what he is, and that the child can sense whether or not he matters to his parents.

Idiosyncratic factors aside, however, are there any factors rooted in the structure of society or the norms of cultures or sub-cultures that would contribute to the child's view that he does or does not matter to

his parents? An obvious problem involved in attempting to answer this question by means of the theoretical replication method is that one or another study may lack the requisite data, making it impossible to assess trans-study consistency. Thus, Nationwide lacks information on gender (the sample is male), Baltimore and East Chicago lack data on rural-urban residence, and New York, Baltimore and East Chicago lack regional variation data. Hence, the effect of certain structural factors could not be examined because information was not uniformily available. We shall, however, consider three factors: socioeconomic status, sibling structure, and religious affiliation.

Socioeconomic Status - Do adolescents in different social classes vary in the tendency to believe that they matter to their parents? Once more, we are faced with a diversity of measures. The Baltimore and East Chicago studies both used the Hollingshead Two-Factor Index of Social Position; the Nationwide study used a composite socioeconomic level measure based on father's occupational status, father's education, mother's education, possessions in the home, number of books in the home, and number of rooms per person in the home; and New York used a weighted index based on father's occupation, education, and primary source of income.

Although it is not easy to summarize the results crisply, the data suggest a rather weak ordinal association between SES and mattering. In all four studies, the highest class ranked higher on mattering than the middle class and in three of the four the middle class ranked higher than the lowest class (in the fourth study they were tied). The linear effect is generally weak, chiefly because the difference between the middle and lowest class is rather small (4-7 percent). The most conspicuous difference,

then, is between adolescents in the highest classes and those in the other classes. (Since the SES measures varied across studies, "highest class" does not have an identical meaning in all studies; it refers simply to those who ranked in the first or second categories in each study.) In Baltimore 47% of the highest class ranked high in mattering compared with 39% of the others (gamma = .2177); in Nationwide, the corresponding figures are 49% and 35% (gamma = .2240); in East Chicago, 41% and 37% (gamma = .2235); and in New York, 43% and 31% (gamma = .2532) (Table 5). The relationships are similar in strength, and all are significant at the .10 level.

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TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

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The adolescents in the highest class are thus consistently, though not conspicuously, more likely than others to feel that they matter greatly to their parents. Our data do not enable us to ascertain why these class differences appear but it is possible to speculate on this issue. In his investigations in the area of social class and child-rearing values, Kohn (1959, 1969) has found that middle class and working class parents differ strikingly in the qualities they value in their children; these differences, Kohn holds, can be traced to the concrete content of adult work activity. The working class is primarily concerned with those qualities in the child that are overt, visible, and behavioral; these parents are particularly concerned that the child is obedient, that he is neat and clean, and that he is honest. The higher classes -- and, in particular, the highest class -- tend to be concerned with inner psychological and emotional states; these parents place primary stress on

whether the child is happy, is curious to learn new things and, to a lesser extent, can exercise self-control (Kohn, 1969: 29-30).

We suggest that the child whose parents are concerned with, and interested in, his inner thoughts, feelings, and wishes is more likely to feel that they are really interested in him as a person than the one whose parents are concerned primarily with his external appearance and overt behavior. Unfortunately, the data to test this interpretation are unavailable. Whether or not it is correct, it does appear that the adolescent's location in the social structure influences his sense of parental mattering and, by extension, his mental health and social adjustment.

Sibling structure - In his classic discussion of the role of numbers in social life, Simmel (1950) pointed out that as the group increased in size, each member (other things equal) came to count for less. This observation suggests the possibility that children from larger families would be less likely to feel that they mattered greatly to their parents than children from smaller families. A second possibility is that birth order would make a difference -- those coming earlier mattering more than later arrivals.

An examination of these two aspects of family structure to parental mattering showed no clear or consistent results across the four studies. One aspect of sibling structure, however, did appear to make a difference: being an only child. Despite the differences in the mattering indices used in the four studies, in each case there is a tendency for only children to rank higher on the mattering indices than children with siblings (Table 6). In Baltimore, 48% of the only children ranked high compared with 40% of the others (gamma = .2346, $p < .211$); in New York,

the corresponding figures were 46% and 29% (gamma = .2946, $p < .002$); in East Chicago, 50% and 34% (gamma = .2439, $p < .036$); and in Nationwide, 27% and 18% (gamma = .1109, $p < .008$).

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TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE

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The data are thus consistent in suggesting that this aspect of family structure has some bearing on the child's feeling that he is an object of concern and importance to his parents, although one of the relationships does not meet the conventional significance levels. Although this conclusion is plausible, it is not inescapable since it could conceivably be the product of certain extraneous variables. Two possible confounding factors would be race and class. Black families tend to be larger than white and hence to have a smaller proportion of only children, and the same is true of lower and working class families. The data in Table 6, however, show that controlling on race or class separately or simultaneously has virtually no effect on the relationships. It thus seems plausible to think that the structural fact of being an only child increases the likelihood that one will feel significant in the life of one's parents.

Religion - Anthropological investigations have suggested that certain cultures or sub-cultures are "child-centered," that is, children represent the focal objects of parental interest. To be sure, it is easy to exaggerate such differences if one confuses overt behavior with underlying attitudes, but the possibility of cultural differences in parental mattering is still worth considering.

The only cultural difference that we have been able to discern -- and even here the results are modest and not always statistically reliable -- is religion; Jewish children tend to score somewhat higher on parental mattering indices than non-Jewish children. One problem, however, is that since Jews constitute only about 3% of the population, the number of Jewish respondents likely to appear in samples of the general population is small. Hence, the data must be treated with caution since they may be consequences of statistical chance.

Keeping these caveats in mind, what do the data show? In Baltimore 57% of the Jewish children but 41% of the non-Jewish children score high on the mattering index (gamma = .2616, $p < .129$); in New York, the corresponding figures are 41% and 32% (gamma = .2187, $p < .046$); in East Chicago, the figures are 46% and 35% (gamma = .3341, $p < .235$); and in Nationwide, the figures are 21% and 19% (gamma = .0512, $p. < .9598$) (Table 7).

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TABLE 7 ABOUT HERE

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There thus appears to be some tendency for Jewish children to score somewhat higher than others on these mattering indices, although only one of the four studies reaches an acceptable level of statistical significance, and the Nationwide study shows virtually no association. One can thus repose little confidence in any of the individual studies in this respect; however, the consistency of the findings across three studies suggests the possibility that the observed association may be real.

But even if the findings were statistically reliable, the results might still not be due to religious differences in child-centeredness but

to associated factors. For one thing, Jewish respondents tend to be above average in socioeconomic status; for another, they tend to come from smaller families and hence may be more likely to be only children. Hence, Table 7 examines the association of religious background and mattering controlling on each of these factors independently and jointly. The partial gammas show that socioeconomic status is indeed partly responsible for the original relationships but being an only child is not. Controlling on SES reduces the Baltimore relationship from .2616 to .1202; the New York relationship from .2187 to .1778; the East Chicago relationship from .3341 to .2158; and the Nationwide relationship from .0516 to .0157. Independent of socioeconomic status, then, the religion-parental mattering relationship is moderate in two studies, modest in one, and non-existent in the fourth. Samples with larger numbers of Jewish respondents would be required before we can repose great confidence in such findings.

Summary and Discussion

This paper has attempted to shed light on certain psychological consequences and social causes of the important though neglected interpersonal attitude of inferred significance, that is, the individual's feeling that he matters in other people's lives. By mattering, we refer to the person's sense that, as far as other people are concerned, he is an object of interest and importance, that he is wanted or serves as an ego-extension, or that others depend on him. In this paper, we have limited our discussion to adolescents and have restricted our analysis to parental mattering. In principle, mattering is anchored in specific individuals so that generalizations based on parental mattering are not

necessarily transferable to sibling, teacher, or classmate mattering.

The data suggest that mattering is important both for the individual and for society. As far as the individual is concerned, the adolescent who feels he matters little to his parents has lower self-esteem, is more depressed and unhappy, is more anxious and experiences other negative affective states, and is more likely to be delinquent.

At first glance, these results would appear to be explained by learning theory. Mattering is associated with many of our major life gratifications, since more good things come to us from those who care about us than those who do not. But if this is so, how can one explain the fact that parental punishment is associated with more favorable self-attitudes than parental indifference; there is certainly no reward associated with being punished or criticized (Rosenberg, 1963). A second possible explanation for the relationship of mattering to mental health is that mattering serves the self-esteem motive which, according to James (1890), is irreducible. And it is true that the adolescent's feeling that he matters to his parents is strongly related to his global self-esteem. But that explanation also does not suffice because, self-esteem aside, mattering continues to be strongly related to emotional disturbance.

The finding that the adolescent who infers that he is significant is happier is doubly interestingbecause mattering is usually a burden, an obligation, and a restriction on freedom. When others depend on us, worry about us, expect things of us, we are constrained and inhibited by these

expectations. The key figure on the team may give more of himself than the inessential one in part because his teammates depend on him. Furthermore, the person who infers that he is significant may consciously experience this situation as a burden and a constraint; but the unhappy person is the one who is free of the burden.

It has been suggested that one problem of retirement is that one no longer matters, counts, has an impact; others no longer depend upon us. "What we owe the old is reverence but all they ask for is consideration, attention, not to be discarded, forgotten" (Herschel, 1971). The reward of retirement, involving a surcease from labor, can be the punishment of not mattering. Existence loses its point and savor when one no longer makes a difference.

The wish to make a difference is thus not easily reduced to other motives. Whether or not James is correct in referring to it as an "innate propensity," it is plain that the feeling that one is a cipher, an irrelevance, or a nonentity touches the profoundest depths of self and relates to depression, anxiety, and delinquency. From the viewpoint of the adolescent, mattering matters profoundly.

But mattering also matters for society, for it is an important source of social cohesion. It is frequently held that one of the main forces binding people to society is their dependence on others. Humans cannot survive, or even be truly human, without other people. But perhaps equally important is others' dependence on us. Discussions of freedom frequently overlook the fact that people assume burdens happily and accept restraints freely if it gives them a feeling of significance, a feeling that they matter to others, that they make a difference. Not all

people, we hasten to add, do embrace these obligations happily. Some raise to the pinnacle of their value systems the state of independence, a state in which they care nothing for others and others care nothing for them. Such people alone can be free. But, in losing their attachment to society, they come to constitute prime candidates for Durkheim's egoistic suicide; and in losing their feelings of significance for others, they come to represent prime candidates for depression and associated emotional states.

Finally, we suggest that mattering may be relatively high among children and adults, low among adolescents and old people. The young child feels that he matters because the world revolves about him, because he is the center of the universe. The adult matters because he runs the world.

The adolescent, on the other hand, is something of a sociological superfluity, an irrelevance. In less advanced societies, mattering would be high because the adolescent would already have established his or her own family. In America a half century ago, the adoescent's family would have depended on his earnings or his work on the farm. Today the family is less dependent on the adolescent for his material contribution. Perhaps this is one reason why the adolescent clings so tenaciously to his peers is that to them, at least, he matters. If it is true that the feeling of being socially irrelevant is widespread among adolescents, this fact may underly some of the problems of contemporary youth.

FOOTNOTES

1. Although the term significant other is usually treated rather loosely to refer to any way in which the other is important to us, recent research has shown that there are different types of significance (e.g., valuation, credibility, personalism-- Rosenberg, 1973; Gergen, 1971) and that others are differentially significant to specific aspects of the self (e.g., role-specific or orientational others: Denzin, 1966; Quarantelli and Cooper, 1966).
2. The work of Hess and Goldblatt (1957) makes clear that adolescents have rather mistaken perceptions of adults' views of them. Specifically, adolescents believe that adults hold more derogatory attitudes toward adolescents than adults in fact do. This finding is especially noteworthy in light of the well-documented tendency for individuals and groups to believe that other people hold them in higher regard than these others actually do (Reeder, Donohue, and Biblarz, 1960; Wylie, 1979). It is possible that adolescents err equally in their assumption of how much they matter to others.
3. The original study consisted of 1988 school children from grades 3-12 in Baltimore City public schools. The present analysis is confined to those subjects in the seventh grade or above.
4. Ruth Wylie's (1979) review of the literature dealing with the relationship of academic achievement and self-esteem leads to a similar conclusion. She notes: "It is obvious that the 19 reports discussed above involved a wide range of types of subjects, self-regard measures, achievement measures, ability measures, and means of trying to control for ability while looking at the relationship between over-all self-regard and achievement. In one way, this variety is a weakness, since direct

replications are not at hand, and systematic comparisons between and among studies are not possible. In another way, however, such variety may strengthen one's confidence in the more usual . . . trends for higher over-all self-regard to be associated with higher achievement levels" (pp. 392-393).

Table 1. Self-Esteem and Parental Mattering: Zero-Order Relationship and Relationship Controlled on Perceived Self

	Gamma	Chi-squared P	Partial gamma, controlled on perceived self	N
Baltimore	.2069	.001	.2017	(657)
Nationwide	.2960	.001	----†	(2065)
East Chicago	.2754	.001	.2990	(1855)
New York	.2798	.001	.3211	(1112)

†No perceived self index available.

Table 2. Mattering and Mental Health Measures: Zero-Order Relationships and Relationships Controlled on Global Self-Esteem

	Zero-order Gamma	Chi-squared P	Partial gamma, controlled on self-esteem	N
Baltimore				
Depression	.3042	.001	.2685	(659)
Worries	.0142	.331	.0525	(680)
Somatic	.1276	.022	.1662	(662)
Nationwide				
Depression	.3360	.001	.2483	(2053)
Worries	.1875	.001	.1514	(2052)
Anxiety-tension	.2176	.001	.1557	(2061)
Somatic	.3577	.001	.2786	(2053)
Negative affective	.3725	.001	.2960	(2047)
East Chicago				
Anomia-depression	.2070	.001	.1895	(1866)
New York				
Depression	.4209	.001	.3813	(1310)

Table 3. Mattering and Delinquency Among Boys

	Gamma	Chi-squared P	N
Baltimore			
Trouble	.1097	.248	(324)
Nationwide			
School delinquency	.2538	.001	(2013)
Frequency delinquency	.2604	.001	(2015)
Seriousness delinquency	.3785	.001	(2013)
Theft/Vandalism	.2230	.001	(2014)
Total delinquency	.2887	.001	(2014)
East Chicago	.2662	.001	(918)

Table 4. Parental Mattering and Parental Significance

	Gamma	Chi-squared P	N
Baltimore	.3691	.001	(640)
Nationwide	.4337	.001	(1913)
East Chicago	.6564	.001	(1853)
New York†	-----	----	------

†No indicators of parental significance available.

Table 5. Mattering By Highest Socioeconomic Status

	Gamma	Chi-squared P	N
Baltimore	.2177	.0827	(657)
Nationwide	.2240	.0001	(2030)
East Chicago	.2235	.0114	(1370)
New York	.2532	.0658	(1031)

Table 6. Mattering and Only Child: Zero-Order Relationship and Relationship Controlled on Race, Socioeconomic Status, and Both

	Zero-order gamma	Chi-squared P	Partial gammas: Controlled on race	Partial gammas: Controlled on SES	Partial gammas: Controlled on both	N
Baltimore	.2346	.2113	.2661	.2554	.2338	(679)
Nationwide	.1109	.008	.1001	.0917	.0892	(1992)
East Chicago	.2439	.036	.2354	.1952	.2036	(1325)
New York	.2946	.002	.2902	.3051	.3115	(930)

Table 7. Mattering and Jewish Affiliation: Zero-Order Relationship and Relationship Controlled on Socioeconomic Status, Only Child, and Both

	Zero-order gamma	Chi-squared P	Partial gammas: Controlled on SES	Partial gammas: Controlled on only child	Partial gammas: Controlled on both	N
Baltimore	.2616	.1289	.1202	.2973	.2227	(616)
Nationwide	.0516	.960	.0157	.0444	-.0245	(1828)
East Chicago	.3341	.235	.2158	.3783	.2716	(1327)
New York	.2187	.046	.1778	.1866	.1559	(918)

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